



PORTFOLIO OF COMPOSITIONS:

EXPLORATIONS OF GENRE WITHIN A CLASSICAL IDIOM

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of Music

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September 2013

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Abstract

I originally intended for this portfolio to consist of pieces mixed between electroacoustic tape parts and live acoustic parts. The actual portfolio I have produced reflects these elements, but I have also found it helpful to write single media pieces to develop my technique in each medium. I also wanted to explore the incorporation of different influences within a classical idiom. This portfolio is underpinned by the belief that “the concert hall is open to the street”¹, and is particularly influenced by popular, culturally influenced, minimalist and grime musics.

This portfolio comprises of acoustic pieces- ...*when all around is fading*...- a piece for symphony orchestra; *Song of the Neighbours*, *Song of the Daughters*, and *the Song of Old Age*- songs written for Lorca’s House of Bernarda Alba; and two mixed media pieces, *The Lingerer Mini-opera*- a piece for a speaking male, mezzo-soprano female, and electronics; and *Out Of The Overflow*- a piece for violin, piano and electronics. The accompanying commentary describes the inspiration and compositional process for each piece, and the accompanying CD contains a recording of the first version of *when all around is fading* and a midi version of the latest version, live recordings of the Bernarda Alba songs, and the electronic parts of *The Lingerer* and *Out of the Overflow* (with a second version of *Overflow* containing a midi rendering of the violin and piano line).

¹ REICH, Steve, (March, 2013) “Radio Re-Write Talk” presented at Town Hall, Birmingham

Acknowledgements

I am indebted to Scott Wilson, Daria Kwiatkowska, Michael Zev Gordon and Jonty Harrison for their input over the last two years.

I am also grateful to Mollie Guilfoyle, David Johnston and the Bernarda Alba team.

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DEFINITIONS AND ABBREVIATIONS WITHIN THE TEXT

BCMG- Birmingham Contemporary Music Group

Dir.- Directed by

Ft.- Featuring

I- Inversion

R- Retrograde

RI- Retrograde Inversion

WAIF- ...whenallaroundisfading...

It should be noted that some scores appear under my nom de plume, Joanna Karselis.

...when all around is fading..., for symphony orchestra (August 2014)

Context and conception

...when all around is fading...'s first incarnation was as a series of sketches for a workshop with Birmingham Contemporary Music Group (hereafter referred to as BCMG) (see appendix A1). The aim was to explore extended techniques and different ways of combining them in orchestration for a sinfonietta ensemble. I created an extended version of the second sketch (see appendix A2) for the UMS Composition Competition, later being commissioned to write a 10-15 minute piece for full symphony orchestra based upon it, before finally realising the version found here.

The piece's title was taken from a song by Tim Hughes; "when all around is fading, and nothing seems to last". I was simultaneously inspired by the music of American composer Charles Ives. Ives, often regarded as one of America's first great composers, combines many sound worlds within a classical idiom and pioneered experimental orchestration techniques. John Adams describes Ives' approach in his *Fourth Symphony* (1965) and in *Three Places in New England* (1919-21) as having "a highly refined sense of foreground, middle ground, and background, an ordering of musical ideas according to their imagined placement in a perspective... Ives was the first composer to approach the orchestral setting as if it were a giant mixing board. Objects... appear on the listener's radar as if the composer were moving faders in a grand mix"². The idea (which this piece has started to explore) of groups emerging and disappearing whilst others are hidden in plain sight influenced me in writing this piece, and I felt Hughes' lyric summed up Ives' concept of everything fading but something remaining. It also refers to the piece's approach to dynamics, inspired by the immersive, constantly shifting chords that open *Music for 18 Musicians* (1976) by Steve Reich.

² Adams, 227.

Realisation

Upon being commissioned to write a 10-12 minute piece for full symphony orchestra, I wrote the original full orchestral score for WAIF that can be found in appendix A3. This version of the score posed problems for the student orchestra; they struggled with the unfamiliar style and playing techniques. The performance helped clarify issues of form and orchestration, leading to the revised score presented here.

Form

After exploring different structures, I adopted Steve Reich's organic approach of non-rigid form seen in pieces like *Electric Counterpoint* (1987) and *Eight Lines* (1979), adapting it for use within defined sections rather than as an overall scheme.

Inspired by Liam Taylor-West's piece *Ruthel Scotson* (2013), *WAIF* opens with *pianissimo*, alternatively fingered string harmonics which form a cluster. In a talk given at Birmingham Town Hall in March 2013, composer Steve Reich discussed compositional techniques in minimalism including his African-rhythm influenced technique³ of providing an orientating moment every twelve beats. Inspired by this, *mezzo forte* moments break the texture in this twelve beat pattern. Eventually the chord breaks, and the texture opens up as the motifs enter. The second section (bar 50) focuses on harmony as different instruments adopt cells and contrasting harmonies swell. After a climax (bar 72), the cells gradually slow and the music comes almost to a halt. The third, sparsely orchestrated section (bar 81) features a unison flute and violin melody repeatedly interrupted by the trumpets and oboes. The section climaxes at bar 98, and "hidden in plain sight" is a piano motif. A reprise of the opening occurs at bar 103, before a climax at bar 107 leaves the piano to emerge again. The section focusses on motivic development, with several small climaxes. A reprise of the second section occurs at bar 151. The section is transposed, and now the swelling of sound cruxes more on dying away than growing. From bar 165 the string

³ REICH, Steve, (March, 2013) "Radio Re-Write Talk" presented at Town Hall, Birmingham

harmonics are re-introduced as the texture decreases until the opening framework returns (with additional harp harmonics) and the piece fades away to where it began.

Motivic development

I developed six melodic motifs and two rhythmic motifs (see figures 1 and 2). Their subsequent transformations formed the melodic material for *WAIF* (see figure 3).



Figure 1- Initial sketch of four motifs

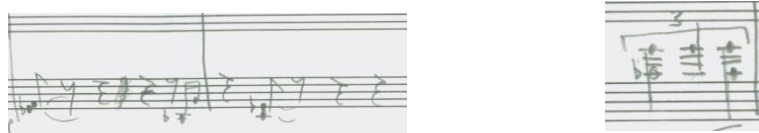


Figure 2- Additional motifs

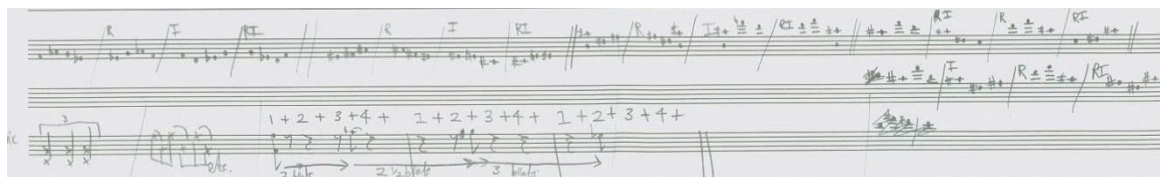


Figure 3- Transformations of motifs

The melodic motifs are all heard by bar 50 (aside from the motif that starts the third section).

Each motif is given space to sound, and is doubled across instruments. The third section begins at bar 81, with a new motif (derived from transformations) in solo flute and violin. After that, nearly all melodic material originates from these ideas.

Harmonic motifs also occur, using rhythmic sequences (rather than motifs) for spacing. For

example the piano motif that begins at bar 50 uses a pattern of 2, 3, 5 quaver and triplet quaver rests between interjections, and its accents occur only on down beats. It also has an extra iteration, including some octave displacement, every 12 beats (to provide orientation as discussed above).

Orchestration

John Adams' waves of sound in *Negative Love* from *Harmonium* (1980-81) and in *Grand Pianola Music* (1982) provide inspiration for my orchestral texture. *Negative Love* begins with voice and flute doubled in a low register, and Adams gradually introduces instruments until beautiful harmonic swells using the full orchestra and choir transpire just before the first verse. Influenced by this, I gradually introduce instruments into chords and using swells, which climax upon arriving into the second section. The beauty of the swells in Adams' work is in their harmonic colour and the gradual ascension of tessitura, which inspires *WAIF's* opening.

The piece opens with string harmonics in a very quiet dynamic register, supported by pizzicato in the viola and 'cello and doubled with plucked piano and xylophone to create a more interesting texture. The violins have free rhythms, creating a random texture. The harmonics became intermingled with natural notes, whilst the dynamics occasionally built to *mezzo forte* before returning to *pianissimo* either gradually or by sudden jump. A cluster gradually builds and the harmony shifts, as the viola adopts harmonics and the oboe supports the piccolo to provide respite and textural change.

The first two motifs are stated in marimba and harp; the first is doubled with pizzicato cello and the second also includes piano. The third is spread across piano, xylophone, clarinet and harp. Above the third motif, the flute motif from the third section occurs as a faint precursor of the later moment. The fourth motif jumps into life in bars 24-26 across clarinet, xylophone, piano and harp. The piano and harp state the fifth motif in bars 32-33. The first brass entry occurs at bar 35 as the trumpets introduce a sixth motif.

The orchestration also has textural and harmonic elements. *Tremolando* features throughout, as do repetitive cells. At bar 37, the cellos begin a flowing but spacious cell, as other instruments join to support the harmony. More instruments join them with increasingly fast rhythms, building to a climax at bar 50. The subsequent *decrescendo* fades in groups based on tessitura.

The swelling chords really begin in bar 55, starting low in the bassoon, trumpet, horns, 'cello, and double bass. In contrast, in bar 59 by a higher, predominantly woodwind chord consisting of oboe, cor, clarinet, bassoon and bass clarinet occurs. These two groups repeat their chords in different inversions, dynamics and with increasing frequency until they collide in bar 72, causing the music to fade.

The instrument groups spend the third section interrupting each other, contrasted between the lighter sound of flute, horn, marimba, piano and strings with the brash interruptions of oboe and trumpet.

The remainder of the orchestration focuses on doubling lines in different ways until the reprise of the second section, after which much is repeated until the end.

HOUSE OF BERNARDA ALBA SONGS, for a cappella voices (March 2014)

Context and conception

I joined the Bernarda Alba project when Michael Zev Gordon recommended me as a composer to director Mollie Guilfoyle. I had never written theatre music before, but after reading the script I agreed to be involved. The play is about a widow (Bernarda Alba) who rules her household with an iron fist. When her eldest daughter starts courting, chaos descends with tragic consequences. Two songs are in the script, but translator David Johnston created additional lyrics inspired by Lorca's Sonnets of Dark Love.

I provided the following programme notes:

When a Western... composer is asked to write Spanish-influenced music, they face a unique challenge. Spanish tradition forms one of the world's richest musics with its evocative, instantly recognisable sound. Classical composers have often absorbed its rhythms and harmonic patterns; yet for a Western art composer to compose predominantly in Spanish style rather than amalgamating it within classical tradition is a great task... How to begin such a project?⁴

As the project began, I realised I "think" too much for Spanish music. Mentally I understood its compositional technicalities, and could reduce it to various techniques and components, but in Spanish music this counts for nothing if you do not internally "feel" it. Its cultural essence was not in me, and therefore I could not write convincingly in this idiom. How could I write music which would evoke emotions in the audience, when I desired to make the genre more palatable to my own taste by amalgamating it within my tradition? I decided upon immersion by listening to folk songs, watching videos of flamenco performers, and notating *palmas* (Flamenco rhythms). The immersion featured traditional folk songs that had been collected and arranged by Lorca himself, and as Mollie and I chose where to place songs in the play, these songs inspired us the most. *Polo*, *Nana de Sevilla*, and *Asturiana* are all taken from Lorca's arranging work. I

⁴ COGLE, Joanna, program notes. House of Bernarda Alba, George Cadbury Hall, Birmingham, March 2013

then approached the lyrics with these songs in mind, ultimately manipulating them into new compositions.

This immersion helped when Mollie and I discussed what performance means to use. I considered recorded guitar parts, but we settled on an a cappella score, as the voice is the most important Spanish instrument.

Three songs from the play are included here. The first is Song of the Neighbours, performed as the local gossips enter Bernarda's house. The next, Song of the Daughters, is about the plight of Bernarda's daughters. Last is the Song of Old Age, performed as Bernarda's mad mother is dragged off.

SONG OF THE NEIGHBOURS

Things locked away
behind these walls
that if they screamed
the world would fill
with their cries.

Sweet nails
Sweet cross
Sweet name of Jesus.

Cover them now
a silent veil
and fear the dawn's
fistfuls of ants
fear its black shoes
of hard water.

weet nails
Sweet cross
Sweet name of Jesus.

There is no sleep
no sleeping here
the nails, the cross
immense shadow
of all our tears.

Sweet nails
Sweet cross
Sweet name of Jesus.⁵

Origins

This song was to be written for the production's two singers. For logistical reasons, the first two verses were set for single voice with harmony and the second voice appearing in the last verse.

Composition

We decided the folk song *Polo* carried the appropriate amount of drama and intense emotion for moment, so I began by transcribing it (see figure 8).



Figure 8- Transcription of Polo

The contrast of stanza and refrain lyrics provided structural basis. I began the verse with the evocatively Spanish sounding turn and minim from the second part of the first phrase. Not only did this instantly sound “Spanish”, but the pitch added drama to the emotionally charged lyrics. I did not want to overly ornament this first verse, instead establishing a recognisable melody. As the verses continue I utilised increasingly complex ornamentation, which climaxes with the final verse. The ornamentation consists of scale based runs, which frequently bend the piece’s metre to add to the “Spanish” feel. Dynamics give the chorus greater impact, as the verse’s volume is traded for quietness which builds to a fanatical climax.

Lyricaly, the song shifts between distress and prayerfulness, linking to the gossiping neighbours and the recent funeral. The passion of the verses is contrasted by the pious chorus, which moves low and initially is less ornamented initially than the verse. The increasing ornamentation of the

⁵ David Johnston, Song of the Neighbours

chorus shows the absorption of the gossiping neighbours of the church within the everyday.

SONG OF THE DAUGHTERS

If I die
leave the window open.
Children play,
from my window I'll see them.
The men call.
from my window I'll hear them.
When I die
leave the window open.

Close it now,
Not to hear the weeping.
All there is
behind the walls is weeping,
all I hear
behind the walls is weeping,

Close it now;
so few angels that sing
close it now
so few dogs that bark.

The weeping
sings like a single angel
the weeping
barks like a lonely dog

Silencing
the wind, the only thing
to be heard.

If I die
leave the window open.
Children play,
from my window I'll see them.
The men call.
From my window I'll hear them.

When I die
leave the window open.⁶

⁶ David Johnston, Song of the Daughters

Origins

This song is for a soprano melody line, and soprano and alto harmonies provided by all the actresses. It is based on the folk song *Nana de Sevilla*; although we moved quite a long way from this original folk song, the different sections and the stately air of the piece are what inspired us to use it.

Composition

I transcribed the song (see figure 10), including harmony due to the chorus element.



Figure 10- Transcription of *Nana de Sevilla*

I wanted this song to move away from the original melody, so I performed transformation of the material into the inversion, retrograde, and retrograde inversion (see figure 11).



Figure 11- Transformations of melodic material

The mournfulness of the words needed a more lyrical, less ornamented melody line than Song of the Neighbours. The introverted simplicity of the opening phrase is contrasted with outward looking lyrics and greater ornamentation in the second and third. As the words become introverted again, the melody drops an octave and the volume suddenly dies. After an extroverted moment, the words climax on “silencing” accompanied by another sudden drop in tessitura and dissonance. These next words feel like thoughts being spoken aloud, arousing a recitative by the soloist. The lyrics and music now repeat, almost in the same form but with

greater ornamentation.

The harmony parts are straightforward. They begin on the same note, gradually descending and creating dissonance with the melody at the end of the first phrase. The harmony builds downwards as the melody ascends in the “children play” section, affirming the melancholy by only padding out the minor chords so major thirds never occur. The harmony becomes dissonant in the “close it now” section, where the two parts repeatedly move upwards in thirds. This helps the section climax whilst illustrating the lyrics’ tension. When the melody jumps down for “close...so few angels who sing” the harmony descends, becoming close to support the introspective feel before expanding outwards with the melody and returning to clashing thirds for “the weeping sings”. As the melody returns to the pattern from “open” the harmony parts jump down to repeat the dissonance we first encountered there. The harmony repeats exactly for the recapitulation of the lyrics.

SONG OF OLD AGE

For I have slept
the sleep of apples,
the dream of the child
cutting her heart
lost on the high sea.

Don’t let them tell me
the dead do not bleed,
don’t let them tell me
their mouths beg water.

Don’t let them speak
of their martyrdom;
don’t let them talk
of the serpent-mouthed moon.

Let everyone know
I have not died,
there’s gold on my tongue
and fire in my heart.

For I have slept
the sleep of apples,
the dream of the child

cutting her heart
lost on the high sea.⁷

Origins

This song is for solo soprano and accompanying alto and soprano from the actresses. As a basis, we chose the folk song *Asturiana*, because of its peaceful and tranquil air.

Composition

After transcribing the melody (see figure 13) I halved it and performed transformations (see figure 14).



Figure 13- Transcription of Asturiana

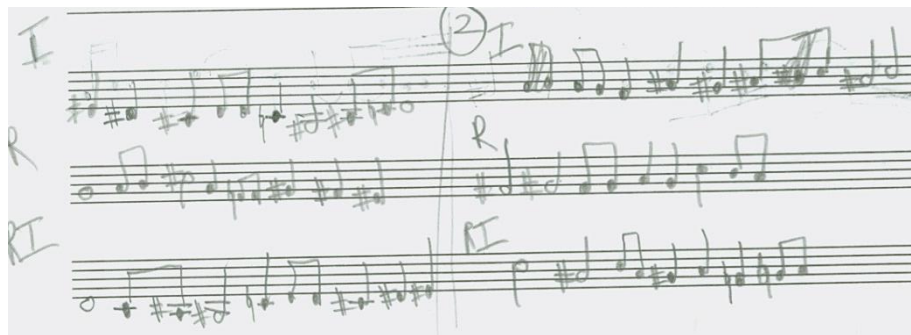


Figure 14- Transformations of melodic material

The words are dream-like, but have an underlying anger. I chose to use a $\frac{3}{4}$ time signature to give the song a lullaby-like feel ($\frac{3}{4}$ is the time signature commonly used for lullabies, because of the rocking feel it has). My opening phrase follows *Asturiana*'s initial shape. The simplicity of the lyrics is reflected in the initially un-ornamented melody. As the words become angrier, the dynamics grow too until they reach *forte* at bar 22. Moving the tempo to $\frac{5}{4}$ allows the soloist' lyrics to feel more strident, as the piece climaxes at the word "heart". The opening is then

⁷ David Johnston, Song of Old Age

repeated with additional ornamentation. The ornamentation is again scale based, elongating the time after arriving one melody note and arriving at the next.

The harmonic parts for this song are straightforward with little dissonance, reflecting the anger of the words in being trapped by old age's lullaby.

Performance and reception of all the House of Bernarda Alba songs

I led all the music rehearsals for Bernarda Alba, which meant conducting and rehearsing a great deal. Some actors knew singing but most were musically illiterate with no experience of choral work. Such a mixed group made rehearsing everyone at the same level difficult, but eventually everyone memorised the music and sang well. Unfortunately, for each performance, nerves and the method for getting notes (an iPad keyboard was quietly sounded offstage and the notes were hummed around) created tuning issues. However the feedback was positive and, as the audience generally knew theatre more than music, quite a few did not notice the problems. I would not write a fully a cappella score for non-musicians again; however I enjoyed writing the music for Bernarda Alba and hope it achieved its goals.

THE LINGERER MINI-OPERA, for electronics and voices (July 2012)

Context and conception

In 2012 the English National Opera staged a competition for young composers to write music for librettos they had selected. I wrote *The Lingerer* using Lori Ann Stephen's Libretto (see appendix C) as I wanted to explore grime music's influence on my classical style, and the percussive lyrics of the *Sweeper* seemed suitable. Grime music began in London in the early 2000s as a sub-genre of hip-hop. Rapper Wiley is considered to be the genre's godfather, and has mentored many grime artists. Grime uses more emotionally intense lyrics and rawer production than hip-hop. It is made less for dancing to and more for appreciating the talent of the MC and DJ. Musically, it encompasses hip-hop, garage, and drum and bass. The genre contains much musicality and poetry, but as many mistakenly refer to it as hip-hop it is tarnished by that genre's reputation, which encouraged me to pay tribute to it.

Libretto

The libretto is about a janitor (called the *Sweeper*) who, whilst cleaning a stadium after a game, encounters the beautiful Panina (also called the *Lingerer*) with her young son. The *Sweeper* instantly desires Panina but he repeatedly asks her to leave, which she refuses to do. Eventually Panina explains she meets her dead son here each night. The *Sweeper* insists that "there is only madness dear, if you choose to stay", because "you cannot live in the wreckage of your dreams", then calls the boy to him. Panina and the *Sweeper* then sing a duet, Panina talking about desiring her son, the *Sweeper* talking about desiring Panina, before the dawn interrupts them. The *Sweeper* insists Panina returns to her living child before setting fire to the vision of her son. Panina reluctantly leaves as the *Sweeper* continues cleaning.

Composition

I began by examining the libretto. I noted down rhythms for the Sweeper and lyrical ideas for Panina. I decided the piece would climax at “My ashen lips turned golden/My mourning soul awaken”, as the characters fulfil their realisations at that moment. To reconcile hip-hop within the opera format I decided against throbbing bass lines and synthesisers, instead settling for drum loops made in FL Studio⁸ and the Sweeper’s “rapping”. The Sweeper’s deliberate “flow” (style of delivering words, for example “skippy”, “slow”, and “fast”) is inspired by rapper Akala. Akala began his career in grime music, but now combines spoken word with hip hop. The percussiveness of his flow on his album *Double Think* was forefront in my mind whilst writing. Having ascertained vocal ideas, I decided to work through the libretto linearly, beginning with an introduction to all the main sound samples as a contemporary overture. Though electronics are a contemporary medium, I wanted to use classical elements such as an overture and leitmotifs to provide familiarity and to help the audience still identify common themes. Additionally, Wagner’s method of running recitative into aria (seen in operas like *Tristan and Isolde*) was inherent in my treatment of the singers, so adopting his techniques for the rest of the opera seemed logical. The samples for the piece are predominantly from my own library of material generated from raw sounds (e.g. rubbing paper on a flight case, hitting a can etc.) which have been manipulated with a variety of VSTs (predominantly with GRM plugins). I wanted the whole piece to pulsate with life, and therefore chose samples which could either fade in or out of the texture, or which had a natural beat inside them.

The overture begins with delicate samples, all of which throb, ebb and flow, before a distant crowd appears to set the scene. I wanted the opening to feel peaceful, so chose almost choral samples as the texture and harmony thicken and the volume grows. This is aided by choosing a small tessitura for the opening samples to sound in which slowly widens. A feeling of darkness is

⁸ FL Studio (previously known as Fruity Loops) is a digital audio workstation by Image-Line which uses a sequencer and patterns to create songs. It comes with a large library of samples, and is commonly used by music producers notably including Skream and deadmau5.

heralded by the low bass and drums entering. I decided to add drum loops only towards the end of the overture to give their entry impact, eventually locking four different loops together.

When the voices enter, the Sweeper is precursed by his leitmotif of a trembling A. The texture for his sections includes a low drum beat, accompanied by some chordal samples with no harmonic movement. His sections also include more bass than Panina's, giving him a steadier feel.

Eventually, Panina's swelling samples occur when the Sweeper becomes introverted, showing her influence over him.

Panina's leitmotif is her drumbeat. Higher in tessitura than the Sweeper's and with a longer delay, it heralds a change in mood. Chordal samples are still used, but they move more harmonically and dynamically than the Sweeper's. Using a delicate, sparser texture allows swelling to emphasise her key words and creates an ethereal mood. The electronics are dissonant against Panina's line, showing her internal discord, although their delicacy and sweeping phrases are also intended to reflect Panina's nature. The Sweeper influences her too, as for her first main entry her flow is broken into speech-like single syllables before smoothing out.

The use of "rapping" adds an element to the text that would be hard to otherwise expand. At the opening, the Sweeper's words do not reflect his heart. Using spoken word means he can simultaneously sound compassionate and like he's trying to convince himself of what he's saying. It also proves useful in the singers' dialogue, as they can quickly bounce off each other (see the 2:19 entry in the vocal score).

At the climax point ("My ashen lips turned golden/My mourning soul awaken") the register of the samples simultaneously ascends and descends. The intensity of sound increases by introducing samples quickly and at greater volume, before everything suddenly drops away. The mood of the piece changes as they realise "these halls are empty in the sun"; the harmony brightens and the bass disappears. A thin texture and a sparse recapitulation of the opening (that contextually sounds major) occur before everything drops out and the drum loop ends.

...OUT OF THE OVERFLOW... For violin, piano and electronics (July 2013)

Conception and origin

Overflow began when I came up with the sequence of chords in figure 17.



Figure 17- the initial sequence of piano chords

I have experimented in the past with layering fifths to create unexpected harmonic movements. The sonority of this set of chords inspired me. I wanted to write for a small ensemble to improve my approach to texture and timbre, so I decided to write for violin and piano. The electronics were introduced later after the acoustic parts were finished, when I realised there was space in the piece that electronics could inhabit. This gave notes room to linger, and for electronics to support the ambient sound. The intention of the electronics is to support and supplement the sounds of the violin and piano, sometimes intuitively and sometimes counter intuitively.

Composition

Retrospectively, I think *Overflow* was subconsciously influenced by John Adams' *On The Transmittigation Of Souls* (2002) (a piece commissioned as a memorial for 9/11 and poignantly featuring the names of the missing and dead being read out by a child), written for recorded voice, live choir and orchestra. Adams' slow building of harmonic material and use of space, as well as combining acoustic and recorded parts, create what he calls a "memory space", where "the music and the words are giving you stimulus but they are not directing your emotion"⁹. Perhaps the reason *Transmittigation* spoke to me so powerfully, and has influenced me ever since

⁹ Adams, www.npr.org

I first heard it, is because it conveys such strong emotion. Something in me responded to the way Adams wrote (I have always strived to write music that will have meaning for the listener), and in turn, I long to evoke emotion in my audience. *Overflow* was inspired by the struggle I feel inside me and see in the world around me every day; the play of light against dark. Such subjects are, by nature, emotive, and I hope *Overflow* carries something of the passion I wish it to.

Overflow shares Adams' ambition of stirring feelings whilst giving the listener space. The stretching of time is inspired by Michael Zev Gordon's pieces *a space in which one might fall back* and *this departing landscape* (2004). In both, Zev Gordon creates texture from sustained piano chords of different inversions and dynamics, particularly using them to build to a climax in *this departing landscape*. This approach, alongside his use of space, is obvious in *Overflow*.

The title was inspired by Jesus' recorded words in the Bible; "out of the overflow of the heart the mouth speaks" (Luke 6:45). Everyone aspires for their heart to have an affirming overflow, but inevitably darkness surfaces. I considered the balance between light and dark (and which, if either, eventually triumphs) in this piece.

I began by developing transformations to avoid the fifths (see figure 19) and creating harmonic material (see figure 20).



Figure 19- transformations of harmonic material

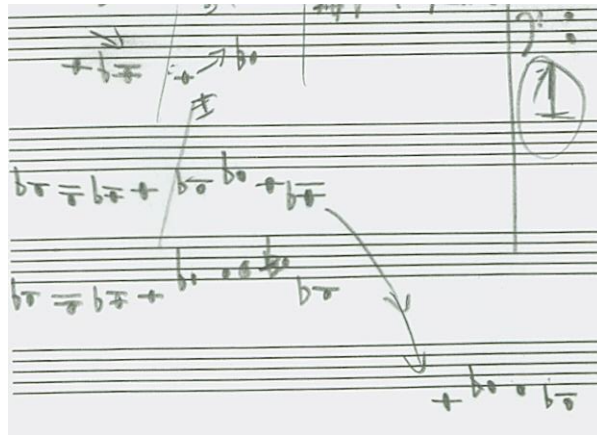


Figure 20- transformations of melodic material

Whilst writing the opening chords, I envisioned crescendoing reverse piano sounds counteracting the acoustic piano's diminuendo. This led me to consider adding electronics to the piece. I proceeded to write the violin and piano parts, and then to fill out the remaining space with samples. Despite the electronics being composed later, I still feel the piano reacts to them intuitively and counter-intuitively as the context requires. When devising the samples, I chose to use a piano sample from FL Studio¹⁰ in the opening section rather than reverse an actual piano note because the electronic edge to the sound makes it simultaneously comparable to but different from the acoustic piano part. I also recorded and altered some natural violin harmonics, which feature throughout. The other samples were taken from my library and altered with spectral filters, pitch shifters and other VSTs to form the remaining electronic material.

Both the electronics and instruments begin with a thin texture, so the initially delicate piano is not overcrowded. The altered violin harmonics particularly lighten the opening sound. The texture thickens at points in the piece, for example at bar 33 a reprise of the opening includes heavier samples than in the initial statement. I wanted the electronics and instruments to sometimes react to each other, for example in bar 10 when a high piano chord interrupts the *crescendo* of the electronics and in bars 39-41 where the growing electronics counteract the dying piano, and sometimes to support each other, for example the single sample that sits underneath the violin at the ending. Including electronics developed the piece in ways I did not

¹⁰ See footnote 8

expect; for example, introducing them altered the existing harmony. Texturally, a variety of samples are used, some with great delicacy, some with thick sounds, and some used purely for their timbral and textural effect. I believe that at each moment in the piece, appropriately sensitive samples have been used to add to the piece's poignancy. Overall, I believe the combination of harmonic and textural samples work together to create a vivid sound world.

I discovered that the piano's tone differs when the key remains depressed from when it is quickly released and sustained with pedal. In *Overflow*, I adopted the quick release technique (clearly seen in the first nine bars, the spacing of which is based on the fade time for each chord). The piano uses the original four chords in different inversions and ranges. Generally movement between the chords is slow, but in the climax section the piano moves ever faster through different inversions which increase in urgency until a jarring seventh builds to the piece's climax (the subsequent diminished piano chord occurs only once in the piece, adding dramatic impact). In contrast to the fifths that make up the piano's material, the violin line uses seconds, thirds and sevenths (apart from where the two lines switch material in bars 64-74, where the violin plays the piano's opening chords and the piano plays the violin's opening notes). The violin focusses on swells within the harmonic texture which sometimes burst into a moment of melody.

A concern of the piece is how performers would rehearse and perform with the tape part. After carefully considering the various options for soundfile playback for rehearsal and performance purposes (including pedal triggering and in-ear counters), I felt that tape-style playback and careful counting on the part of the live performers would be the most effective solution.

CONCLUSION

When writing my masters proposal two years ago, I spoke about how classical music needed to be open to popular music, and how mixed media would be the future of Western art music. Two years on, I still believe these statements are true, but I know my exploration of these ideas has just begun. I will continue to be inspired by classical music with a popular edge, like Adés' *Estacio* from *Asyla* (1997) and Reich's Radiohead infused *Radio Rewrite* (2013); likewise I will be influenced by popular musicians who use classical music, like Vorpál's *Gymnopedie v11* (2009) (a remix of Satié's *Gymnopedie Number 3*) and Sigur Ros's epic orchestral soundscapes. For now, this portfolio showcases my expanding instrumental and vocal techniques, as well as the influence popular music and mixed media music have had on me.

APPENDICES

Appendix A- Libretto for The Lingerer Mini-Opera

CD TRACK LISTING

- 1- ...when all around is fading... midi version
- 2- ...when all around is fading... March 2013 version
- 3- Song of the Neighbours
- 4- Song of the Daughters
- 5- Song of Old Age
- 6- The Lingerer (re-mixed electronics)
- 7- The Lingerer (earlier version, not as well mixed but with voices)
- 8- ...out of the overflow... With electronics
- 9- ...out of the overflow... Without electronics

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SCORES

...when all around is fading...

House of Bernarda Alba Songs

The Lingerer Mini-Opera

...out of the overflow...